

**Written Testimony of Amy Lin Meyerson, Esq.
as Co-Chair of the Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Council
In Support of Raised Bill HB6760
February 27, 2022**

Esteemed Chairperson McCrory and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for providing the Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Council (HCAC or Council) with the opportunity to provide written testimony on the formation of the **Connecticut Civics Education and Media Literacy Task Force** to study and develop strategies to improve how public schools provide instruction on civics, citizenship, media literacy and American government to students. We present this testimony in support of Raised Bill HB6760 An Act Concerning Civics Education and Literacy.

Created by state law under [Connecticut Statute § 51-279f](#), the Council is responsible for encouraging and coordinating programs that increase community awareness and reporting of hate crimes to combat such crimes. It also is responsible for making recommendations for legislation concerning hate crimes, including recommendations on restitution for victims, community service designed to remedy damage caused by any such crime, and additional alternative sentencing programs for first-time offenders and juvenile offenders.

The HCAC supports this raised bill as a vehicle for improving the development of: “(1) reviewing existing curricula and the high school graduation requirements, (2) developing skills-based educational interventions to **promote diversity, equity and inclusion**, to **deter hate speech and confront bias**, to teach **techniques of de-escalation and peaceful conflict resolution**, and to teach the **skills of respect for opposing views, compromise, and collaboration to achieve a goal**, (3) receiving recommendations from educators, administrators and the public, (4) a review of best practices, and (5) exploring the feasibility of establishing public and private partnerships to fund and support enhancements to such instruction.”

Hate and bias are present among school students, teachers, staff, and administrators. Education can steer our culture away from fear, ignorance, and hatred towards humanity, mutual understanding, and the pursuit of justice.ⁱ As most implicit biases and prejudices are developed during childhood, school-aged children may be the most receptive audience to anti-bias training.ⁱⁱ School-based programs in Connecticut have a strong foundation in current laws. Thanks to bi-partisan support and political leadership over recent years, Connecticut is the only state with mandated public-school curricula on: Holocaust and Genocide and African American, Latino, Native American, LGBTQIA and, most recently, Asian American and Pacific Islander studies.ⁱⁱⁱ For these curricula to have an impact, schools and teachers need more investments in addressing their local communities. Despite the fledgling mandated curriculum, bias incidents, attacks, and hostility continue to affect every school community. Current laws and practices support Social and Emotional Learning which offer lessons on inclusion, equity, mutual respect, dignity, and acceptance. However, we urge more explicitly stated learning objectives on religious literacy, dignity for transgender students, anti-racism, and gender equity. Schools and communities can work together to “create and maintain conditions in which *prejudice gives way to tolerance and bias-motivated violence is replaced with peaceful problem-solving*.”^{iv}

The implementation of new curricula and policies faces several challenges including shortages of teaching staff and fatigue from years of pandemic education. Districts need to support teachers to address new curricula and policies and to build confidence and capacity.^v Teachers, staff, and administrators should be the targets of training and support efforts because they will typically be responsible for implementing anti-bias curricula and policies. Additionally, stronger incentives for developing and recruiting more diverse teachers also have a positive effect on student outcomes, yet retention of these teachers depends upon the existence of support for them. Support and retention efforts should be redoubled to ensure that teachers are able and willing to return in subsequent years. In short, the recommended anti-bias curricula updates, existing reforms in inclusive curriculum, and policy changes will only be as effective as the teachers, staff, and administrators tasked with implementing them. Sustained funding and support are imperative.

School-based interventions should support the explicit teaching that acceptance, inclusion, and listening to others are critical skills of any successful adult in a democracy and should demand that students demonstrate those skills and attitudes.^{vi} Since Connecticut is a “home-rule” state with administrative power over schools held at the district level, we recommend interventions at both district and regional levels.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit written testimony. On behalf of the Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Council, we urge the Committee and the Legislature to support Raised Bill HB6760 to assist in preventing and deterring hate crimes in Connecticut.

Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Council

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Co-chair: Amy Lin Meyerson, Esq., Past President, Connecticut Bar Association

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Christopher D. Ferace (Connecticut Police Chiefs Association designee)

As required under state statute, ten officials serve as ex-officio members and the governor is responsible for appointing the remainder of the members, as well as selecting two of them to serve as co-chairpersons. The Council is housed within the Office of the Chief State's Attorney.

ⁱ "Hate Crime in America Policy Summit," Int'l Ass'n Of Police Chiefs, <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/hate-crime-in-america-policy-summit> (last accessed July 7, 2022) (hereinafter "Policy Summit").

ⁱⁱ Adam Hoffman, "Can Science Help People Unlearn Their Unconscious Biases?" Smithsonian Magazine (July 2, 2015) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/can-science-help-people-unlearn-their-unconscious-biases-180955789/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Governor Lamont Announces Connecticut Schools Ranked Top Three in Nation by Education Week," Office of Governor Ned Lamont (Sept. 2, 2020) <https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2020/09-2020/Governor-Lamont-Announces-Connecticut-Schools-Ranked-Top-Three-in-Nation-by-Education-Week>.

^{iv} "Policy Summit" *supra* note i.

^v Kim Elliott, Jessica Juliuson, Nevin Katz, & John Parris, "In Support of Educators: Strategies That Work," Education Development Center, p. 1 (2021) <https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/uploads/InSupportOfEducators.pdf>.

^{vi} "Policy Summit" *supra* note i. ("An informed citizenry is the cornerstone of our democratic society." "Messages of bigotry and intolerance can be countered by [schools] with truthful information that promotes mutual understanding and honors diversity.")